

BEDTIME WONDER TALES

THE FOX AND THE LITTLE RED HEN

BEDTIME WONDER TALES

BY

CLIFTON JOHNSON

HOP-O'-MY-THUMB

THE BABES IN THE WOOD

THE BRAVE TIN SOLDIER

THE FOX AND THE LITTLE RED HEN

GOLDEN HAIR AND THE THREE BEARS

CINDERELLA

PUSS IN BOOTS

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

LITTLE RED RIDING-HOOD

THE STORY OF CHICKEN-LICKEN

Additional books will be added
to this series from time to time.





The robber fox comes home

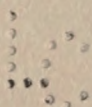
(Page 15)

BEDTIME WONDER TALES

THE FOX AND THE LITTLE RED HEN

BY
CLIFTON JOHNSON

ILLUSTRATED BY
HARRY L. SMITH



NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

PZ8
J45
F0

Copyright, 1919
By THE MACAULAY COMPANY

All Rights Reserved



SEP 23 1919

Printed in the U. S. A.

©C17A529926

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The books in this series of Bedtime Wonder Tales are made up of favorite stories from the folklore of all nations. Such stories are particularly enjoyed by children from four to twelve years of age. As here told they are free from the savagery, distressing details, and excessive pathos which mar many of the tales in the form that they have come down to us from a barbaric past. But there has been no sacrifice of the simplicity and humor and sweetness that give them perennial charm.

The sources of the stories in this volume are as follows: Page 11, America; 16, Scotland; 31, Grimm; 37, Scotland; 48, England; 56, Grimm; 61, Italy; 82, India; 100, Sweden; 127, American Negro.

CONTENTS

I	OUTWITTING THE FOX	11
II	THE SILLY SHEEP	16
III	A NEW HOME FOUND	21
IV	A THIRD FAILURE	27
V	KING OF THE BIRDS	31
VI	ALEXANDER JONES	37
VII	AN EXCITING MEETING	42
VIII	THE GOLDEN BALLS	48
IX	A GIRL AND A RABBIT	56
X	WHAT THE STARS TOLD	61
XI	DION THE WANDERER	66
XII	THE TOURNAMENT	74
XIII	A CLEVER RAT	82
XIV	TWO COACHMEN DINE	88
XV	A PRINCESS'S TROUBLES	93
XVI	NIMBLE LARS	100
XVII	THE DUKE'S PALACE	106
XVIII	A SCRAP OF PAPER	114
XIX	A PUZZLING SITUATION	121
XX	PAYING THE JUDGE	127

ILLUSTRATIONS

THE ROBBER FOX COMES HOME . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>	
	<i>See text page</i>	15
DRIVING OUT THE SHEEP WITH A BROOMSTICK .		18
THE RABBIT THAT STOLE CABBAGES		58
NIMBLE LARS AND HIS CARTLOAD OF OLD SHOES.		118

THE FOX AND THE LITTLE RED HEN

I

OUTWITTING THE FOX

ONCE upon a time there was a little red hen who lived in the edge of a piece of woodland.

On the other side of the woodland dwelt a crafty robber fox with his mother.

One morning, right after breakfast, the robber fox said: "Mother, you make a fire and get the pot boiling. I'm going to catch the little red hen. We'll cook her as soon as I come back and have her for dinner."

Then he slung a bag over his shoulder, and started for the little red hen's house.

The little red hen did not suspect that she

12 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

was in any danger, and she busied herself with her morning work as usual. Afterward she looked at her clock to see what time it was.

“Well,” she said, “now I must begin to get dinner, and the first thing I’ll do is to step out into the yard for a few chips to make my fire burn more briskly.”

So out she went, and while she was filling her apron with the chips the fox arrived. But she did not see him, and he slipped slyly along in the shelter of the trees and bushes toward the house.

She kept on with her task, and at a moment when her back was turned he ran in and hid behind the door.

“I’ll catch her easily enough now,” he said.

Pretty soon the little red hen came in. She was just going to shut and lock the door when she saw the fox. The sight gave her

such a fright that she dropped all her chips and flew up to a peg in the wall.

“Ha, ha!” the robber fox laughed, “it won’t take me long to bring you down from there.”

Then he began running round and round after his tail.

The little red hen knew that this was some trick of his to catch her, and her heart went pit-a-pat with fright. She kept turning about on the peg to watch him. That made her dizzy, and in a few minutes she fell off.

At once the fox picked her up, and put her in his bag. He had succeeded in his undertaking and he started for home feeling very smart. By and by he grew tired and sat down to rest.

As he sat there the little red hen began to wonder if she could contrive to escape. She did not want to be eaten, and she thought and thought until at last she happened to think

14 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

that she had her scissors in her apron pocket.

“I’ll use those scissors to get out of this horrid bag,” she thought.

Without waiting another moment she took the scissors, snipped a hole in the bag, and jumped out. The ground just there was strewn with stones. The little red hen picked up several of the stones that were as large as she could lift, and put them in the bag in her place. Then she ran home as fast as she could go.

After a while the fox got up and went on. “How heavy this little hen is!” he said to himself. “She must be very plump and fat. Ah! won’t she make a nice dinner.” And he smacked his lips as he thought of how good she would taste.

When he came in sight of his house he saw his mother standing in the doorway. “Hi, mother!” he called out, “have you got the pot boiling?”

“Yes, yes,” his mother replied; “and have you brought the little red hen?”

“She’s here in this bag I have on my shoulder,” was his answer; “and she’ll make a fine dinner.”

He soon reached the house and went in. “Now, mother,” he said, “when I count three, you take the cover off the pot, and I’ll pop the little red hen right into the hot water.”

“Very well,” his mother responded.

“All ready,” the fox said; “one, two, three!”

His mother took the cover off, and splash went the stones into the boiling water. They were so heavy, and descended so violently that they tipped over the pot of boiling water, and the robber fox and his mother were scalded to death.

But the little red hen lives in the edge of the woodland by herself yet.

II

THE SILLY SHEEP

A SHEPHERD and his collie dog were driving a flock of sheep along a moorland road. One of the younger sheep turned aside to nibble some tufts of nice tender grass that grew behind a large boulder. The boulder hid him from the shepherd and the collie dog, and they passed on.

When the sheep finished browsing the grass he looked around and found he was all alone. But that did not trouble him, and he loitered here and there until he noticed that the sky had grown dark and threatening.

Night was near, and the sheep ran about over the moorland waste in great anxiety seeking for shelter. Then rain began to fall.

A rumble of thunder increased his fears, and the croak of a raven in a neighboring pine tree nearly drove all the little wits he had left out of his head.

“Baa, baa, baa!” the silly sheep cried as he galloped hither and thither. “What shall I do?”

Just then he spied the smoke of a cottage chimney curling up from behind a heathery hillock, and he hastened toward it. Soon he came to a little wicket gate. He pushed it open, and ran up a path between a patch of potatoes on one side and a patch of cabbages on the other side. At the end of the path was the cottage door, and he burst it open and entered the kitchen.

An old woman lived in the cottage, and she was sitting by the kitchen fire. “Goodness me!” she exclaimed, and jumped up in a great fright. But as soon as she saw the sheep she recovered from her alarm.

18 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

“Well, well!” she said, “good luck has fallen to me today, for I feel sure I can make some money out of this visitor. I’m glad to see you, my pretty sheep,” and she dropped him a curtsy.

So she gave him the best of care, and all he had to do was to eat, sleep, and chew his cud at her fireside. He was not without gratitude, and one day as he lay before the hearth he said to himself: “I wish I could do this kind old woman a favor. I would do anything that is within my power to please her.”

While he was lying there the old woman came in and got supper ready. She was very tired, for she had been out all day working in the turnip field. After she finished eating she yawned and said, “O deary me! how I wish the supper dishes would clear themselves off the table, and that I was in bed.”



Driving out the sheep with a broomstick

“Ah!” the silly sheep thought, “now is my time to do the old woman a favor. I have grown strong enough, thanks to her good feeding, to easily do what she wants done.”

Up he got, made a sudden rush, and butted the table upside down. Then he made a second rush and bounced the old woman onto her bed, which was close by against the wall.

“Baa, baa, baa!” the silly sheep exclaimed. “What do you think of that, old woman? I have cleared off your table, and there you are flat on your back where you wished to be.”

“Just wait a minute and I’ll baa, baa you!” the old woman screeched from the bed.

She got up slowly and painfully, reached out her hand, and got her broomstick. The silly sheep had no suspicion that she in-

20 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

tended to punish him. "Now comes my reward," he said.

But in a twinkling he found himself outside, with bruises all over him. He did not dare to go back, and he ran off across the moorland.

III

A NEW HOME FOUND

AFTER the silly sheep had been driven forth from the home where he had been so comfortable, he felt as if he had been very badly used.

“Well, there’s no accounting for the ingratitude of some people,” he moaned. “I shall certainly be careful how I do a kindness next time.”

He wandered disconsolately along until the daylight was fading into darkness. “Baa, baa, baa!” he cried. “Will no one take pity on a poor lost sheep? Baa, baa, baa! Ah, there’s a chance for help at last!”

He had caught sight of another old woman. She was carrying a spinning-wheel

22 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

up a narrow path that led from the highway toward a wood.

“I’ll follow her,” the sheep said. “She can’t carry that thing far. I fancy we must be near her house.”

So he ran on to overtake the old woman. Soon she reached her cottage at the border of the wood, and was about to enter it when she heard footsteps behind her.

She glanced around and exclaimed: “Hello! why here’s a sheep. I’m in luck. The poor thing looks banged about, but a day or two of good care will make him all right, and I shall presently shear a nice fleece. Come in, pretty sheep, come in and welcome.”

Then she held the door of her cottage open, and the silly sheep went in and lay down by the fire. He knew how to behave well in a house, and he and the old woman got on capitally. She chuckled to herself

over her good fortune. Her stock of wool was getting low, and here was enough on the sheep to keep her wheel going for a long time to come.

So the silly sheep received the best of care and throve and grew fat. His fleece became shining and silky, for the old woman combed and washed it daily, and the sheep could not help wishing to do something in return. He began to watch for a favorable opportunity to show his gratitude. One fine morning, just before shearing time, the chance came.

“What a trouble it will be for me to have this sheep sheared!” he heard the old woman mutter as she was eating breakfast. “I must go up the valley this very day to engage a man to do the shearing. How I wish the fleece would come off of itself and save me all the bother!”

After she had left to go up the valley,

24 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

the sheep said: "I think I can get off the fleece without troubling any one to shear me. The old woman has been so kind that I don't grudge doing whatever I can to please her. Besides the weather is very sultry. I shall feel much more comfortable without this thick covering of wool, and the sooner it is off the better."

At the back of the cottage was a thorny hedge, and in a pasture field beyond were many clumps of prickly furze. The sheep went out and looked around. "The hedge and the furze bushes will be just the things," he said.

Then he capered in and out of the hedge, and rubbed about among the furze clumps, until no wool was left on his back except a few wretched shreds hanging here and there in rough tangles. He was cut and scratched from head to foot and presented a most melancholy appearance.

Presently a brisk wind sprang up, and a good half of the scraps of fleece, that hung in festoons of every length on furze and hedge, was caught by the breeze and sent flying along the road. These scraps were a pleasant surprise to the old woman, who saw them as she neared home on her return. She supposed they had been shed from a passing flock, and though not of much value, she picked up the larger pieces.

When she arrived at her cottage and saw the tattered sheep standing in the pathway, and the bits of wool scattered about everywhere on the bushes and the ground, she was dumb with astonishment and rage.

“Baa, baa, baa! See what I have done for you,” the silly sheep cried.

He observed that the old woman was striding toward him, and he added to himself, “Baa, baa, baa! here comes the reward.”

26 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

But the next moment he found himself kicked through the wicket gate into the road.

“O dear! O dear!” the silly sheep groaned, “what an old brute she is to behave so!”

He galloped down the road as fast as three legs could carry him. The fourth leg had been struck by the old woman’s heavy hob-nailed shoe, and was too sore for use.

IV

A THIRD FAILURE

AFTER the silly sheep was kicked out of the wicket gate by the old woman who lived at the edge of the wood he wandered on and on along the lonely moorland road. "Baa, baa, baa!" he cried, "will no one take pity on a poor lost sheep?"

All day he limped slowly forward, only stopping now and then to nibble a little grass or to drink from a wayside brook. The sun was low in the west when he caught sight of an old woman picking up sticks in a thicket a little off the road.

"Baa, baa, baa!" the silly sheep bleated. "Ah! there is help at last. I will lie down here in the grass beside the road, and wait

28 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

till the old woman is through with her wood-gathering.”

She soon finished her task, and then toiled off homeward with a bundle of sticks on her back. The silly sheep had been watching and he followed right at her heels until she reached her cottage. Just as she opened the door, he slipped past her into the room, and lay down by the fire.

“Why, here is a sheep!” the old woman exclaimed. “Where in the world can he have come from?”

She bent over the silly sheep to examine him more closely, and said: “Oh, mercy me! what a state the poor thing is in! Somebody has been abusing him. His wool is nearly all torn off, but he is fat and is a prize worth having.”

That evening, after she had eaten her supper, she cut off the ragged bits of fleece that still hung about the sheep, washed his

cuts and bruises, and fed him generously.

As time passed on she gave a great deal of attention to making him comfortable, and he grew sleek again and so fat he scarcely cared to move from his place by the hearth. He did little but eat and sleep all day long.

So delighted was the sheep with his new quarters and his new mistress that his former misfortunes were forgotten. "Surely," he thought, "such a kind old woman cannot be ungrateful. I will try to do her a favor if I can discover what she wants."

Now the dark nights of November approached, and the old woman decided it was time to salt some mutton and hang it up in the larder for use during the winter. One afternoon, while she sat considering how much of the mutton would do fresh for her present use, and how much was to be salted, she reached out her hand and stroked the silly sheep. "What a lovely time I

30 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

shall have eating you!" she remarked.

"Eating me!" the sheep exclaimed under his breath. "Is that what she intends to do? The old wretch! I wouldn't have thought it after all her kindness. Plainly, this is no place for me."

Pretty soon the woman put on her shawl and went to the village on an errand. Then up got the sheep, and out he went to the moorland road and ran away as fast as he could go. But that was not very fast, for he was extremely fat.

On and on he hurried until about dusk he ran into a flock of sheep. To his joy he discovered that it was the very flock to which he belonged, and from which he had been so long absent. Never afterward did he lag behind the other sheep when the shepherd was driving them from one place to another, and, so far as I know, he is still feeding on the moorland with that same flock.

V

KING OF THE BIRDS

ONE summer's day a bear and a wolf were walking along together in a wood when they heard a bird singing very sweetly.

“Brother Wolf,” the bear said, “what kind of a bird is it that we hear singing so prettily?”

“That is the King of the Birds, before whom we must do reverence,” the wolf replied. But really it was only a wren.

“If that is the King of the Birds,” the bear said, “I would like to see his royal palace. Show it to me.”

“I will show it to you as soon as the queen returns home,” the wolf responded.

So they waited and kept a sharp watch. Soon they saw the queen go to her nest, which

32 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

was in a crevice of a bank. She carried food in her beak for her young ones. A few moments later she flew away.

Then the wolf and the bear went and peeped into the nest. They saw five or six young birds in it.

“Is that wretched hole a royal palace?” the bear asked. “And do you mean to say that those are royal children? They are miserable brats!”

When the young wrens heard him speak in that way of them, they were furious. “No, no, we are not!” they shrieked. “You shall be punished for your insulting words.”

The bear and the wolf began to be scared, and they went off and hid themselves in their dens. But the young birds went on screaming and making a terrible noise.

As soon as their parents brought them food again, the fledgelings said: “We will not touch so much as the leg of a fly—no,

not if we starve—till you have proved that we are respectable children. The bear has been calling us names.”

“There, there, my dears,” their father said, “be quiet, and he shall be punished.”

So the father and mother birds flew to the bear’s den, and cried: “Old Growler, why have you insulted our children? You shall suffer for what you have done. We declare a fierce war on you.”

The wrens flew away, and the bear made haste to call his friends to his aid. In response to his appeal, the four-footed beasts assembled in great numbers—cattle, donkeys, elephants, lions, and every animal that walks the earth with four feet.

Meanwhile the wrens summoned all the creatures with wings—not only the birds, but gnats, hornets, bees and flies. The father wren sent out spies to discover who was to be the general of the enemy’s army.

34 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

Among the spies were some gnats, and they were the most cunning of all. One of them flew to a wood and found the four-footed beasts holding a council beneath a great tree. He alighted on a leaf of the tree, and heard the bear say to the fox: "Reynard, you are famous for your slyness. So you shall be our general and lead us."

"Very good," the fox said; "and now we must agree on a signal. I have a fine long bushy tail which looks very like a white-tipped red feather at a distance. If I hold it straight up you can know that all is going well. But if I allow it to hang down you must run for your lives."

When the fox finished speaking, the gnat flew back and told the father wren what had been said.

At dawn the next morning the four-footed beasts came rushing forward to battle with the birds. They roared and bellowed, and

the very earth shook with their tread. The wren and his army came also, whirring through the air, screaming and flapping and buzzing enough to make you tremble in your shoes.

Thus the two hosts advanced against each other, and the wren sent a hornet to settle on the fox's tail and sting it as hard as possible.

The hornet did as it was ordered. When the fox felt the sting he lifted a hind leg, but he bore the pain bravely and kept his tail in the air. Again the hornet stung, and the fox was forced to let his tail droop a little bit, but only a little. Then the hornet stung for the third time, and down went the tail of the fox between his legs.

The other beasts at once concluded that all was lost, and each ran as fast as it could go to its own hole. So the birds won the battle.

36 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

The wren and his wife flew home to their children, and said: "Now be happy. Eat and drink to your hearts' content, for we are the victors."

But the young wrens said, "We will not touch a thing until the bear has been to the nest and begged our pardon and admitted that we are respectable children."

The parent wrens therefore flew to the bear's den, and shouted, "Old Growler, you must come to our nest and beg pardon of our little ones for calling them names, or you shall be punished!"

Their threat terrified the bear greatly, and he came crawling to the nest and apologized.

Thus, at last, the young wrens were satisfied, and they ate, drank, and made merry far into the night.

VI

ALEXANDER JONES

“KATE, move a wee bit east,” the town clerk said to his wife as they sat together on a high-backed bench before the fire one chilly autumn evening. “You’re taking too much room. You have more than your share of the seat.”

But Kate had just got her knitting into a tangle, and was not in the best of humor. So she paid no attention to her husband’s request, and moved not a single inch.

“Kate,” he said again, “move a wee bit east. It’s not right to sit so selfish. I’m at the very end of the bench, and here you are with your elbows digging into me. Sit a bit east; do you hear?”

38 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

When she did not respond, the town clerk gave his wife a rude shove.

“What do you mean by pushing me like that?” she demanded. “And what do you mean by east? There’s no such thing as east, and I can prove it.”

“No such thing as east!” the town clerk shouted. “Will you not believe the sun? You know very well that the sun goes around the earth every day and is always rising every moment somewhere in the east. Therefore everywhere is the east all over the world. So I hope you will not make a goose of yourself and talk nonsense.”

Kate rose to her feet, and said: “You do not look at the matter in the right way at all. As for the sun, it is constantly setting somewhere in the west and doing it every moment. Therefore, everywhere is west; and I trust you will not be so foolish as to mention east again.”

He shook his head and was going to reply, when she began to run around the table to show how the sun went, at the same time crying loudly, "West, west, west!"

This made the town clerk very angry, and he got up and ran around the table in the opposite direction, yelling, "East, east, east!" to show how he thought the sun went.

Yet it only ended in their getting extremely giddy and banging their heads together, a thing which hurt very much, and did not improve their tempers, nor help solve the difficulty, you may be sure.

Meanwhile Alexander Jones sat quiet in a corner and said nothing.

The town clerk and his wife were agreed on one thing, which was that the question was of too deep importance to be left unsettled so they went to the grocer, who had a good-sized house up the street, and Alexander Jones went with them.

40 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

They told the grocer about their dispute. The grocer and the grocer's maiden aunt, and the grocer's wife's youngest married sister, and the grocer's wife's youngest married sister's little girl were all much interested. But some took one view, and some took another; and then they all began to run around the table, a part of them in one direction crying, "East!" and the rest in the opposite direction crying, "West!" to show how the sun moved, in their opinion.

It only ended in their getting extremely giddy, and in banging their heads together, a thing which hurt very much and did not improve their tempers nor help to solve the difficulty.

Meanwhile Alexander Jones sat quiet in a corner and said nothing.

They all agreed in one thing, which was that the question was of too deep importance to be left unsettled. So the whole com-

pany, including Alexander Jones, went to the home of the mayor. His dwelling was a large house facing on the market-place.

They told him of the dispute with all the ins and outs of the matter. The mayor, and the mayor's wife, and the mayor's favorite uncle, and the mayor's oldest nephew, and the mayor's nephew's little boy were all much interested, to say the least. But some took one view and some took another view; and then they all began to run around the table, a part of them in one direction crying, "East!" and the rest in the opposite direction crying "West!" to show how the sun really moved, in their opinion.

This only ended in their all getting very giddy, and in banging their heads together, a thing which hurt and did not improve their tempers nor help to solve the difficulty.

Meanwhile Alexander Jones sat quiet in a corner and said nothing.

VII

AN EXCITING MEETING

THE people at the mayor's house all agreed in one thing, which was that the question was of too deep importance to be left unsettled. So the mayor called a meeting of the whole populace in the town hall. The people assembled, and Alexander Jones was there among the rest. The only persons not present were Peter the watchman and his sister Jessica.

Then the mayor told about the dispute, and everybody was much interested. But some took one view, and some took another view, and they all wanted to run around a table to show how each thought the sun moved.

Here, however, a difficulty arose; for,

alas! there was no table in the town hall to run around, and what were they to do?

But they would not allow themselves to be balked by a trifle like that—not they. So they requested the mayor to stand in the middle, and let them run around him, each in the direction he or she pleased.

The mayor strongly objected to such a proceeding. He said it would make him dizzy to see some folks going one way around him, and some the other.

“I would certainly be sick,” he declared. “Therefore, I suggest that Alexander Jones be placed in the middle. Yes, why couldn’t we run around him? Better make use of him, he is so stupid and says nothing. Besides, I want to run around with the rest of you myself, and why should I be cut out? So I say let’s run around Alexander Jones.”

“No, no, no!” the people cried. “Alexander Jones is too small. We would tread on

44 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

him. Alexander Jones would not do at all."

They insisted that the mayor must do as he had been asked. "Didn't we give you a gold badge to wear only the other day?" they said. "You must make us some return for it or we will take it away."

So the poor man had to give in. But he insisted on having his eyes bandaged, and also on having a chair to sit in. Otherwise, he knew he would be sick. The chair was brought, his eyes were bandaged, and down he sat.

Then the people began to run around him, some one way crying "East!" and some the opposite way crying "West!" to show how the sun really moved, in their opinion.

This only resulted in their getting very giddy, and banging their heads together, a thing which hurt, and did not improve their tempers nor help solve the difficulty. Worst of all, just at the end, when they could run

no longer and were quite out of breath, Eliza MacFadden, the fat widow who kept the candy shop, fell plump against the mayor, and sent him and his chair tumbling to the floor.

Meanwhile Alexander Jones sat quiet in a corner and said nothing.

The mayor pulled the bandage off his eyes in a towering passion, and declared that something must be settled then and there. He threatened to put a tax on buttons if they did not agree. That was rather clever of him, for every one, old and young, male and female, wore buttons, and would feel the tax.

But he himself would be affected less by the tax than anybody else because he wore a robe; and this robe, instead of being buttoned, was fastened by a buckle at the neck, and by a jeweled girdle around the waist.

Now the town clerk addressed the people.

46 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

“We must avoid this button tax at all hazards,” he affirmed. “Let us devise some way to solve for all time this terrible riddle which gives us so much concern. I propose that we call Peter the watchman in from the street. He is up at all hours, and doubtless knows more than most persons about the sun’s movements.”

“Yes,” the grocer said, “by all means call in Peter, but if we do we must invite his sister, Jessica. She does the mayor’s washing and is a person of importance in the town. Peter would certainly decline to come unless she came with him.”

So Peter and his sister were sent for and we soon heard their footsteps and those of the messenger approaching in the street. This was, indeed, most provoking for me, because there was no room left in the town hall for another person, and two would have to go out in order to admit Peter and Jessica.

First they put out Alexander Jones, because he was so stupid and said nothing. Next they put out me, because I was a stranger and only present in the hall out of courtesy. Thus it happened that I never knew what was the decision of the meeting.

But perhaps you wonder why Alexander Jones was so dull as to sit in a corner and say nothing. Yet how could he do anything else? Alexander Jones was the town clerk's old

TOM-CAT.

VIII

THE GOLDEN BALLS

Two lassies who were sisters went to a fair on a pleasant sunshiny day in summer. As they were coming home they met a young man. They never had seen such a good-looking young man before. He had gold braid on his cap, a gold ring on his finger, and a gold watch-chain. Evidently he was as rich as he was handsome.

In each hand he carried a golden ball, and he gave one to each lass, saying, "Be careful not to lose it, for if you do, you shall be hanged."

The girls carried the golden balls home, and put them safely away. But one day the younger sister took her ball outdoors to play

with it in the yard back of the house. Beyond the high yard wall was a park, and presently, as she was tossing up the ball, it went over the fence.

By standing on tiptoe she brought her eyes above the top of the wall, and could look down to where the ball fell. There it was rolling along on the green grass, and it kept on rolling. Nor did it pause for hillock or hollow, but continued to roll till it entered the open door of a house that was in the park, and was gone from sight.

Immediately afterward, the handsome young man appeared before the lass. "Come with me," he said; and he took her away to be hanged, because she had lost her golden ball.

The hanging was to take place three days later, he told her, but she would be spared if she could recover the ball in that time.

She had a sweetheart, and was allowed to

50 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

send a note to him telling what had happened. As soon as he read it he said, "I will get the lost ball."

He went to the park gate, where an old woman with some keys dangling from her girdle confronted him, and asked what he wanted.

In response, he told of the loss of the golden ball, and she said, "If you want to get it, you must sleep three nights in the house in this park where the ball now is."

"That I will do," he said.

Then she unlocked the gate and let him pass. He went to the house and walked straight in at the door. For some time he wandered from room to room looking for the ball, but he did not find it, and he saw no one.

Night came, and he had lain down to sleep in an upper room when he heard some bogles in the courtyard. He looked out of the win-

dow, and saw that the yard was full of them. While he was watching them, he heard heavy footsteps coming upstairs.

So he hid behind the chamber door and kept as still as a mouse. Soon a big giant, who was five times as tall as the youth, entered the room. He looked around. There was no one in sight, and he went to the window, bent down, and put his head out.

He was resting on his elbows looking down at the bogles when the youth stepped behind him, and dealt him such a tremendous blow with his sword that he was cut in twain. The upper part of the giant's body fell out of the window down in the yard. The other part leaned against the window ledge.

A great cry rose from the bogles when they saw half the giant come tumbling down to them. They called out to the youth, whom they could see at the chamber window: "Ho,

52 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

there! here is half our master. Give us the other half."

"Well," the youth said, "a pair of legs standing at the window is of no use;" and he cast the lower part of the giant after the upper part. When the bogles had gotten all the giant they were quiet.

The next night the youth was at the house again, and he lay down to sleep in the same upper room. By and by a second giant came tramping up the stairs. Just as he stooped and was entering the door with his head thrust forward, the youth leaped from the bed, sword in hand, and cut off the giant's head.

But the legs walked across the room to the fireplace and disappeared with the body up the chimney. Then the youth picked up the head, and threw it up the chimney, saying, "Go where your legs have gone."

The third night the lad was once more in

the house. Scarcely had he lain down when he heard the bogles under the bed. They had the golden ball and were throwing it to and fro. The lad kept a sharp watch, and presently the ball rolled out into sight. Instantly he grabbed it, and then away he went to seek his true love.

She had been taken to a prison in a distant town and was to be hung the next day. Morning came, and everything was ready. She was brought out from the prison to a scaffold on the town square, and a crowd gathered to look on. The hangman was beside her, saying, "Your hour has arrived."

"Stop, stop!" she exclaimed. "I see my mother coming. O mother, have you brought my golden ball and come to set me free?"

"No," her mother answered, "I do not know where your golden ball is, and I have

54 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

only come to bid you a last good-by before they hang you."

"Now, lass," the hangman said, "repeat your prayers; for you must die."

But she cried out: "Stop, stop! I think I see my father coming. O father, have you brought my golden ball and come to set me free?"

"No," her father responded, "I do not know what has become of your golden ball, and I have only come to bid you a last farewell before you are hung."

"Lass," the hangman said, "you are only making fun of me. I will wait no longer. You must be hung at once. Say your prayers, and put your head in the noose."

But now she saw her sweetheart approaching through the crowd, and she said: "Stop, stop! I see my sweetheart coming. Sweetheart, have you brought my golden ball, and come to set me free?"

The youth held the golden ball over his head in the air, and replied, "Yes, I have brought your golden ball, and come to set you free."

So she was allowed to go, and he took her home. Not long afterward they were married, and they were happy all the rest of their lives.

IX

A GIRL AND A RABBIT

ONCE there was a woman who had a garden full of nice cabbages. But about the time the cabbages were half grown a rabbit began to come to the garden every day to eat them. He ate and ate until the woman was afraid none would be left for her unless she put a stop to his eating.

So she said to her little daughter, "Go into the garden and drive out that rabbit."

The girl went to the garden, and cried: "Shoo, shoo! rabbit. Don't eat all our cabbages."

"Come maiden," the rabbit said, "sit on my tail and go with me to my home."

But the girl would not, and the rabbit ran

off alone. The next day, however, he came again and ate the cabbages as fast as ever.

Then the woman said to her daughter, "Go into the garden and drive away that rabbit."

The girl hastened to the garden, and shouted: "Shoo, shoo! rabbit. Don't eat all our cabbages."

"Come, maiden," the rabbit said, "sit on my tail and go with me to my home."

But the girl would not, and the rabbit ran off alone. He was back for a third time the next day eating as usual.

The woman looked out presently and spied him. "Go into the garden," she said to her daughter, "and drive away that rabbit."

The girl hurried to the garden and shouted: "Shoo, shoo! rabbit. Don't eat all our cabbages."

"Very well," the rabbit said, "I will let the cabbages alone, if you will sit on my tail and go with me to my home."

58 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

So the girl seated herself on the rabbit's tail, and the rabbit took her to his home.

When they were inside of the hut where he lived he said: "Maiden, you shall be my wife. We will be married this evening. While I am gone to invite the guests and get the parson, you can cook some beans and carrots. That will make a fine wedding feast."

Off ran the rabbit, and he invited all the other rabbits who had homes in the neighborhood, and he invited a number of squirrels and several foxes. He arranged to have a crow, who was a parson, come to do the marrying.

But the girl did not want to be a rabbit's bride. So after she had hung a kettle of beans and carrots over the fire, she made a figure of straw and put her apron and bonnet on it. Lastly, she propped it up on a stool by the fireside to watch the kettle of



The rabbit that stole cabbages

beans and carrots. Then she hurried to her own home as fast as she could go.

By and by the rabbit returned to his hut and saw the girl, as he supposed, sitting by the fire.

“Get up, get up!” he said. “The wedding guests are coming, and we must have the feast ready on the table for them.”

He looked out of the window. “Yes, yes!” he cried, “I see them. They will soon be here.”

Then he turned toward the maiden, and was surprised to find that she had not stirred.

“Get up, get up!” he shouted. “The guests are at the door.”

The girl, however, said nothing, and remained seated. This made the rabbit very angry. He went close to her, and yelled: “Get up, I say! Don’t you hear me?”

The guests were already crowding in at

60 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

the door, and the rabbit was so irritated that he raised his paw and boxed the girl's ears. To his dismay, the head of the straw figure tumbled off, and he thought he had killed his intended bride.

He was frightened, and so were all the guests he had invited. They scrambled out of the hut, and the guests got away to their homes at their top speed.

As for the rabbit, he was too scared to return to his cabin. So he fixed up a new abode in another part of the woodland, and he did not eat any more cabbages in the woman's garden.

X

WHAT THE STARS TOLD

LONG, long ago a party of hunters were returning from a forest to the Court of Naples. One of them was so proud that he would not ride with the others, but galloped on in front by himself. Night came, and, as he was a stranger, he lost his way.

By and by he came to a peasant standing in the middle of the road, and he asked directions of him. The peasant at once went with the hunter to a near hilltop, and pointed in the direction of Naples.

The hunter, whose clothing showed him to be a person of high degree, thanked his guide, and said, "Now, my man, what were you doing when I met you?"

"I was reading the stars," the man re-

62 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

plied. "A baby boy has just been born in my home, and I would know what his fortune in life is to be."

"And what did the stars tell you?" the hunter asked, laughing.

"They say that the child will be King of Spain," the man answered.

"What!" the huntsman exclaimed. "King of Spain? No less than that?"

He spoke as if he thought such an idea was a good joke, but really he was not at all pleased. For he, himself, was the King of Spain, who had come to visit his brother, the King of Naples. What if the stars had foretold the truth?

He was a very crafty man, and he said to the peasant: "If your son is to be king some day you are not fit to bring him up. You must give him to me. I am rich and of noble rank. He shall go to my home and be trained as a young prince."

It was a dazzling offer, but the father thought, "My wife would never give her child to a stranger, and neither would I."

Then he said, "Come with me, if you choose, and my wife shall answer you."

They walked back to the peasant's cottage, and the matter was explained to the mother, but the hunter did not tell who he was. She refused his offer with indignation.

Weeks and months passed, and still the stranger came from time to time coaxing and commanding the parents to give up the child. But he met with no better success than at first. The boy had been born with a mark on his right arm. It was a little royal crown. His parents were careful not to let the stranger see it or know of it lest he should long the more for their child. They little guessed the stranger's evil intentions.

64 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

One day the King of Spain hired a wicked man to go and steal the child. After loitering about the cottage for a while in the dusk the man picked up the child while the mother's back was turned. The boy made no outcry and the man got on his horse and was out of sight and hearing before the peasant's wife missed her child.

He rode till he came to a thick wood. His orders were to kill and bury the baby there, but when the little one smiled up in his face, pity entered the ruffian's heart, and he said, "I am a wicked man, but I cannot kill a little child like that."

So he left him there, and brought back to the king a blood-stained garment, but the blood was that of a kid.

"I buried the baby in the wood," he said, to his cruel master. And, indeed, he had covered the sleeping child with leaves before he came away.

Then the King of Spain went back to his own country. "Well, that's settled," he thought. "No base-born peasant shall sit on my throne."

XI

DION THE WANDERER

THE abandoned child slept and waked, and cried and slept again. At last the morning light woke him once more, and he threw off the leaves, played with them, and laughed aloud.

While the baby was thus enjoying himself, a gentleman named Don Lovico was riding by on a fine horse. "What is this? What is this?" he cried. Then he dismounted, picked up the child, and rode off with him in his arms.

When he reached his home, which was at a great distance over the mountains, he said to his wife: "Here is a fine gift for you. We have no children, and if this baby

boy is not claimed we will bring him up as our own son.”

His parents inquired everywhere if a young child, with the mark of a royal crown on its right arm, had been found. But the only trace they got of him was years afterward. Then a wandering beggar told them a tale of how a dying friend of his had confessed to stealing a baby from their cottage, at the command of a rich stranger, and how he had left it in a thick wood. Bitterly did they regret that meeting with the stranger huntsman.

The child's new parents called him Dion, and he grew up under their care to be clever, handsome, and good-natured. He might have lived with them always, but one day a servant told him that instead of being Don Lovico's son, as he supposed, he was a foundling.

Straightway he went to his foster-par-

68 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

ents, and asked them if that was true. They confessed it was, but said they loved him as if he were their own.

Nevertheless the news made him restless. He longed to cease living idly on Don Lovico's estate and to go out into the world. "Perhaps too," he said, "I shall find my own father and mother, and let them know I did not die in the wood."

So he thanked Don Lovico and his wife for their care of him, and away he went. For many months he wandered without finding either fortune or his parents. He crossed mountains and traveled in strange lands, till he came to the kingdom of Spain.

Hunger was his companion on the road, and though he was a willing lad, he found no work to do. Some said he was not old enough, and others said he looked like too fine a gentleman. At last, as he was peeping

through the bars of a gate, one evening, he saw a gardener watering flowers.

“What do you want?” the gardener asked.

“I am hungry,” Dion told him. “If you’ll give me something to eat, I’ll help you with your work to-morrow.”

“Well, it happens that I am in need of a lad just now,” the gardener said. “You shall have food and wages too. This is the garden of the King of Spain, and if you work hard, you will get on very well here.”

So Dion became the gardener’s helper. He had plenty to eat, and he sang and whistled at his work all day long. At length he attracted the attention of the king—the very same wicked king who had tried to have him killed when he was a child, but of this Dion knew nothing.

The boy had good manners, and he was active and handsome. So one day the king

70 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

said to him, "I want you to wait on me and be my servant in the palace."

Then Dion left the garden and the gardener's cottage, and went to the palace to wait on the king. The work was light, and he had spare time which he used in improving himself in all the knightly exercises he had learned at Don Lovico's.

Occasionally he was asked to attend the beautiful young Drusa, the king's only daughter. He brought her flowers from the garden, and sang to her, and they grew to love each other very much. The king paid no attention to what they said or did at first. He thought that Dion, who had been a mere gardener's boy, would not aspire to his daughter's hand.

But when he observed them more closely he concluded there was more affection between the two than could be tolerated. So he hurried Drusa off to her uncle, the King

of Naples, with orders that she was to be sent to school in a convent.

A fortnight later he called Dion to him, and said: "You would like to see Drusa again, would you not? I have a letter to send to my brother, the King of Naples. You shall be its bearer."

Young Dion set out on his errand with a light heart, never for a moment guessing that the letter he carried contained an order to the King of Naples to hang the bearer without delay. As luck would have it, when he was near his journey's end, he was shown a short cut to Naples through some woods. In this woodland, who should he find strolling on the very path he had taken but Drusa and her governess?

What a joyful meeting that was for the lad and the maiden! The governess, who liked and trusted Dion, did nothing to chill the happiness of the two.

72 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

Presently Drusa said, "Now tell me what brings you here."

"I carry a letter from your father to your uncle," he responded. "Perhaps you had better take me to the palace that I may deliver it."

Drusa, who knew quite well how angry her father was with Dion, suspected mischief in the letter. "You need not deliver it just yet," she said. "No, no, not yet, I beg you."

Then she told him of a great tournament that was soon to be held in Naples. Whoever should prove himself to be the bravest and most skilful knight for three days was to marry the Princess Drusa.

"Think what my sorrow has been since I heard this," she sighed. "But you shall enter the lists and see what you can do. Enter as a stranger, and do not tell your name. Keep the letter till the jousting is over. If there should be any blame for doing so, let

it be on my head. I will see that a horse is placed at your service, and you can busy yourself practicing feats of arms till the tournament begins. Meanwhile live quietly and obscurely. Not far from here is the cottage of an old peasant and his wife. They are good friends of my governess, and they will take you in, if she asks them."

Dion went to the cottage, and was well received by the old couple. They both felt a great affection for him from the very first moment, and they were much interested when he told them he had come there from Spain.

XII

THE TOURNAMENT

Now it became known at the king's court that a Spanish stranger was to enter for the great prize of the three days' tournament. He was sent for by the council who were arranging the affair.

"Are you a knight?" they asked.

"No," he replied, "but I have been thoroughly trained in knightly exercises."

"That will not do," they told him; and he went to Drusa in despair.

"If you are not a knight, a king's daughter can make you one," she said.

So she had him kneel before her, and then bade him rise up a knight in the service of the Princess Drusa of Spain.

Dion, the knight, went to the tournament, and for two days was victor. But it was whispered that a certain competitor had not yet shown his full strength and skill. He was said to be reserving himself for the third day, and was reputed to be one of the wonders of the world—a doughty champion, altogether unconquerable. The talk of the city was that, brave and capable as Dion had proved himself, he would be as chaff before the fury of the champion's onslaught the next day.

This chatter reached Dion's ears, and he returned to the peasant's cottage somewhat after nightfall very much disheartened over his prospects.

Earlier that evening the old man had said to the old woman, "Wife, I have a mind to go out and read the stars."

"The stars are liars," the old woman declared.

76 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

“The stars cannot lie,” her husband said, “but I may read them wrong.”

Then he went out and looked up at the spangled sky. Once more he read in the stars that his son should be King of Spain.

“Alas, alas!” the old man cried, “but I have no son.”

He went into the cottage and told his wife, and they wept together, for they had never ceased to mourn the child they had lost twenty years before.

“Now you must own that the stars do lie,” the woman said.

At that moment their guest came in, weary after the day's contest, and dispirited about the morrow. They attended to his wants, and when he was refreshed he asked them why they had been weeping.

“We were thinking of our son whom we lost when he was a baby, twenty years ago,” the woman answered.

"How did that happen?" the young man inquired.

Then they told him of the meeting with the strayed huntsman, who was evidently some person of high degree, and of the evil that resulted. "We have heard that he hired a man to steal and kill our child," the old peasant said, "but that the villain left the baby alive in the woods. No doubt the little one was either devoured by wild beasts or perished of hunger."

"That is strange," Dion commented. "Twenty years ago I was picked up, a helpless babe, in the woods by a good gentleman, who treated me afterward as his own son. Tell me, if your son were alive, how would you know him?"

"He had the mark of a royal crown on his right arm!" the old woman cried excitedly.

The young man plucked up his sleeve and

78 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

showed the mark, larger now and more distinct. Then there was great joy in the cottage. They embraced and mingled their tears. But soon the father was again sorrowful.

“Alas! dear son,” he said, “we get you back only to lose you. We are humble folk, and you are destined to be the King of Spain.”

“The King of Spain!” he repeated. “What are you thinking of? I am more likely to be a beggar. I have deeply offended the King of Spain, and tomorrow, without his knowledge, I am going to fight the champion of the world to win the Princess Drusa. I love her well, but I shall certainly be defeated. What will become of me then I do not know. At any rate I have found my parents, and will be a dutiful son. While I am able to work for you, you shall never want.”

“Why do you talk of defeat?” his mother said. “Defeat for you is impossible. This very night the stars have foretold that you are going to be King of Spain.”

“The stars said the same thing on the night you were born,” his father added.

So Dion went to the tournament next day with a heart full of courage, and he unhorsed the champion of the world every time.

Then the King of Naples sent for the victor and said: “You have won a great prize. Here is the Princess Drusa, who is to be your wife. I will write to my brother, the King of Spain, that he has a fine brave son-in-law.”

“I am a messenger from the King of Spain,” Dion said, and took from his pocket the letter he had brought.

The King of Naples broke the seal and read the letter with a darkening brow. “What is this?” he cried. “Who are you?”

80 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

My brother orders me to have you hanged. What crime have you committed? But whoever you are or whatever you have done, my word to you is pledged. I will place you under guard until I see my brother of Spain."

"Marriage first, uncle," Drusa said. "A crowned king may not break his word. After we are wedded we will go to prison together, if need be. Does my lover look like a criminal?"

Just then Don Lovico appeared, and stepped forward. "No one shall say that youth is a criminal in my presence!" the noble exclaimed. "He is Dion, my foster-son."

"Don Lovico! Don Lovico!" the young man cried, throwing himself into the gentleman's arms.

Then there were explanations and relating of adventures; and lo! as they talked, a

messenger from Spain arrived, dressed in mourning. He came to say that the king of his country was dead, that the king had repented of his harshness, and that if his servant Dion were still alive he was to be set free.

So Dion married the princess, and they went back to Spain, where Dion was crowned. One of the first things he did was to build a high tower, in which his father could sit and read the stars. By their aid the old peasant foretold many events, and the king, his son, was thus able to take steps that again and again saved his country from misfortune.

XIII

A CLEVER RAT

ONCE upon a time a fat sleek rat was caught in a shower. He was far from shelter; so he set to work and soon had dug a nice hole in which he sat very comfortably protected while the raindrops splashed outside, and made puddles in the road.

During his digging he had pawed out a fine bit of root, quite dry and fit for fuel. He put it aside carefully in order to take it home with him. When the shower was over, he set off with the dry root in his mouth.

As he went along, daintily picking his way among the puddles, he saw a poor man vainly trying to light a fire, while a little circle of children stood close by crying piteously.

“Goodness gracious!” the rat exclaimed, “how those young ones do squall.” He was both soft-hearted and curious, and he went to the man and asked, “What is the matter?”

“The children are hungry,” the man replied. “They are crying for their breakfast. I am trying to make a fire so I can bake some bread for them, but the sticks are damp and won’t burn.”

“If that is all your trouble, perhaps I can help you,” the good-natured rat said. “Here is a dry root which I am sure will soon make a fine blaze.”

The poor man thanked him again and again as he took the dry root. In a little while he had a brisk fire burning, and then he baked the bread. He presented the rat with one little loaf as a reward for his kindness.

“What a lucky fellow I am?” the rat said, as he trotted off gayly with his prize.

84 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

“Fancy making a bargain like that! I’ve got food enough to last me five days in return for a rotten old stick. Wah! wah! wah! What a fine thing it is to have brains!”

He lugged his loaf along till he came to a potter’s yard. The potter had left his wheel to spin round by itself and was trying to pacify his three little children who were screaming as if they would burst.

“My gracious!” the rat cried, stopping his ears, “that’s a dreadful noise. Mr. Man, do tell me what it is all about.”

“They are hungry,” the potter said ruefully. “There is no flour in the house, and their mother has gone to the market to get some. In the meantime I can neither work nor rest because of them.”

“Well, I can help you,” the rat told him. “Take this loaf of bread, and stop their mouths with it.”

The potter overwhelmed the rat with

thanks for his generosity. Then he chose a nice well-burnt pipkin, and insisted on the rat's accepting it as a remembrance.

The rat was delighted at the exchange, and, though the pipkin was a trifle awkward for him to manage, he finally succeeded in balancing it on his head. That done, he went gingerly down the road, tink-a-tink, tink-a-tink, with his tail over his arm for fear he would trip on it.

And all the time he kept saying to himself: "What a lucky fellow I am! and clever, too! Such a hand at a bargain!"

By and by he came to some herders taking care of their cattle. One of them had pulled off his shoes and was milking a cow into them.

"Oh, fie! oh, fie!" the rat cried, quite shocked at the sight. "What a dirty trick! Why don't you use a pail?"

"For the best of all reasons—we haven't

86 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

one," the herder growled. He didn't consider it any of the rat's business.

"If you haven't a pail, oblige me by using this pipkin," the dainty rat said.

The herder was quite willing. He took the pipkin and milked into it till it was brimming full. Then he turned to the rat, who stood looking on, and said, "Here, little fellow, you can have a drink in payment."

But if the rat was good-natured he was also shrewd. "No, no, my friend," he said, "that will not do. As if I could drink the worth of my pipkin at a draft! My dear sir, I never make a bad bargain. I expect you to give me the cow you were milking."

"Nonsense!" the man exclaimed; "a cow for a pipkin! Who ever heard of such a price? And what on earth could you do with a cow if you had one? Why, the pipkin was about as much as you could manage."

At this the rat drew himself up with dignity, for he did not like allusions to his size. "That is my affair, not yours," he retorted. "Your business is to hand over the cow."

XIV

TWO COACHMEN DINE

JUST for the fun of the thing, and to amuse themselves at the rat's expense, the herders tied a string to the cow's horns and began to tie the other end to the rat's tail.

"No, no!" he called in a great hurry, "if the beast pulled, the skin of my tail would be taken right off. Tie the string round my neck if you please."

So with much laughter the herders tied the string round the rat's neck. Then the rat took a polite leave of them, and started off gayly toward home with his prize. That is, he started off with the string, for no sooner did he come to the end of the tether than he was brought to a sudden stop.

The cow, nose down, kept grazing, and

would not budge until she had finished her tuft of grass. Then she saw another in a different direction, and marched off toward it, while the rat, to avoid being dragged, had to trot humbly behind, willy-nilly.

He was too proud to confess the truth, and he nodded his head knowingly to the herders, saying: "Ta-ta, good people! I am going home this way. It may take longer, but it's pleasanter."

Then the herders roared with laughter. The rat, however, took no notice, but trotted on, looking as dignified as possible.

"After all," he reasoned to himself, if I keep a cow I must look after her grazing. A beast needs to get a good stomach full of grass if she is to give milk, and I have plenty of time at my disposal."

So all day long he trotted about following the cow, making believe. He was dreadfully tired by evening, and felt truly thankful

90 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

when the great beast had eaten enough and lay down under a tree to chew her cud.

Just then a coach stopped under the tree. Inside was a bride on her way to meet the bridegroom and be married. Outside were two attendants. They got down, made a fire, and began to cook some food.

“What detestable meanness!” one grumbled. “A grand wedding, and nothing given us to eat on our journey but plain rice stew! Not a scrap of meat in it! ’Twould serve the skinflints right if we upset the bride into a ditch.”

The rat saw a way out of his difficulty, and he exclaimed; “Dear me! that is a shame. I sympathize so fully with your feelings that I will give you my cow. You can kill and cook her.”

“Your cow!” the discontented coachman cried; “what rubbish! Whoever heard of a rat owning a cow?”

“Not often, I admit,” the rat said. “But look for yourselves. Can you not see with your own eyes that I am leading the beast by a string?”

“Oh, never mind the string!” one of the hungry coachmen said. “Whether you own the cow or not, I intend to have meat with my rice.”

Then he and his companion killed the cow, and cooked her flesh. They ate their supper with relish. Afterward they offered the remains to the rat, saying carelessly, “That is for you.”

“Look here!” the rat cried hotly, “you don’t suppose I’m going to let you have my best cow that gave quarts and quarts of milk—the cow I have been feeding all day—for what is left after you two big lubbers have eaten all you could hold. No!—I got a loaf for a bit of stick; I got a pipkin for the loaf; I got a cow for the pipkin; and now I’ll have

92 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

the bride for my cow—the bride, and nothing else.”

The coachmen began to reflect on what they had done, and they became so alarmed at the consequences that they concluded they had better escape while they could. So they left the bride in the coach and took to their heels.

XV

A PRINCESS'S TROUBLES

AFTER the coachmen had run away, the rat went to the coach, and with the sweetest of voices and best of bows begged the bride to descend. She hardly knew whether to laugh or cry. But any company, even a rat's, was better than being alone in the wilderness. So she got out of the coach, and followed the rat, who set off as fast as he could for his hole.

As he trotted along with the lovely young bride, whose rich dress and glittering jewels made it evident that she was some king's daughter, he said to himself: "How clever I am! What bargains I do make, to be sure!"

When they arrived at his hole, the rat

94 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

stepped forward with the greatest politeness, and said: "Welcome, madam, to my humble abode! Pray step in, or, as the passage is somewhat dark, I will show you the way, if you will allow me."

Thereupon he ran in, but he was soon aware that she had not followed. Then he put his nose out and said testily: "Well, madam, why don't you enter? Don't you know it is rude to keep your husband waiting?"

"My good sir," the handsome young bride said with a laugh, "I can't squeeze into that little hole!"

The rat coughed. Then, after a moment's thought, he remarked: "There is some sense in your response. You are certainly overgrown, and I suppose I shall have to build you a thatched hut somewhere. Tonight you can rest under that wild plum tree behind you."

"I am hungry," the bride said.

"Dear, dear!" everybody seems hungry today," the rat exclaimed pettishly. "However, I'll fetch you some supper in a trice."

He ran down into his hole, and returned promptly with an ear of millet and a dry pea.

"There!" he said triumphantly, "isn't that a nice meal?"

"I can't eat such stuff," the bride objected. "I want rice stew and eggs and cakes and candy. I shall die if I don't get them."

"Mercy!" the rat cried in a rage, "what a nuisance a bride is! Why don't you eat the wild plums?"

"I can't live on wild plums," the bride declared, weeping. "Nobody could. Besides, they are only half ripe, and I can't reach them."

"Rubbish!" the rat cried; "ripe or unripe,

96 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

they must do for you tonight. In the morning you can gather a basketful and sell them in the city. With the money you get you can buy eggs and candy to your heart's content."

When morning came, the rat climbed the plum tree, and nibbled away at the fruit stems till the plums fell down into the bride's veil. Then, unripe as they were, she carried them to the city, and called out through the streets—

"Green plums I sell! Green plums I sell; I'm princess and rat's bride as well!"

She passed by the palace, and her voice was heard by the queen, her mother, who ran out and recognized her. Then there were great rejoicings, for every one thought the poor bride had been eaten by wild beasts.

In the midst of the feasting and merri-

ment, the rat, who had become alarmed at the long absence of the princess, arrived at the palace door. He beat against it with a stout knobby stick, shouting fiercely: "Give me my wife! Give me my wife. She is mine by fair bargain. I gave a stick and I got a loaf. I gave the loaf and I got a pipkin. I gave the pipkin and I got a cow. I gave the cow and I got a bride. Give me my wife! Give me my wife!"

The queen called out through the door: "For goodness' sake! son-in-law, what a fuss you make, and all about nothing. Who wants to prevent you from joining your wife? We are proud to see you, and only keep you waiting at the door till we can receive you in style."

On hearing this the rat was mollified and waited patiently outside while the cunning old queen prepared for his reception. This she did by cutting a hole in the middle of a

98 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

stool, putting a red-hot stone underneath, covering it with a stewpan lid, and spreading a beautiful embroidered cloth over all.

Then she went to the door and welcomed the rat with the greatest respect. He came in, and she led him to the stool. "Pray be seated," she said.

"How clever I am!" he thought, as he climbed onto the stool. "What bargains I do make, to be sure! Here I am son-in-law to a real live queen. What will my neighbors say?"

At first he sat on the edge of the stool, but even there it was warm, and he soon began to fidget. "Dear me, mother-in-law, how hot your house is!" he said.

"A nice breeze comes through the window near you," she responded. "Sit more in the middle of the stool so the breeze will cool you."

He moved as she suggested, but he did not

stay to be cooled by the breeze, for he would have been frizzled on the stewpan lid. What he did was to escape in all haste, vowing that never, never again would he make a bargain.

XVI

NIMBLE LARS

THERE was once a young duke who belonged to a very grand family, and whose dwelling was one of the finest, yet he was not content to stay at home. Instead, he went off to see the world.

Wherever he traveled, he was well liked, and was received in the best and gayest families. But he kept on spending his money until his purse had not even a farthing left in it; and that made an end to his friends as well. They had all been very willing to help him get rid of his money, yet now he could not obtain aid from any one of them. So there was nothing he could do except to trudge home, and beg for crusts on the way.

Late one evening he came to a great for-

est. He did not know where he could find shelter for the night, but he kept on searching till he caught sight of an old tumble-down hut among some bushes. This was not by any means satisfactory to so fine a cavalier. However, when you cannot get what you want, you must take what you can get.

He went into the hut. Evidently it had not been lived in for a long time, and it was perfectly bare of furniture except for a big chest alongside the wall. What could there be in that chest? He hoped there was a little food in it, for he had eaten nothing the whole day, and his stomach was aching with emptiness.

When he lifted the lid he found another chest inside. He lifted the lid of that, and still another chest was revealed. He kept on opening chests and finding one a size smaller each time. The more there were the

102 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

harder he worked, for he felt sure he would finally be rewarded with something very fine, it was so well hidden.

At last he came to a tiny box, and in this box lay a bit of paper. That was all he got for his trouble. He was very much annoyed.

Then he observed that something was written on the paper. "Hm-m!" he said, "just two words that have no significance whatever—'Nimble Lars.' "

But the moment he spoke these words somebody asked, "What are my master's orders?"

He looked around, but saw no one. "This is very funny," he said, and again he read the words aloud, "Nimble Lars."

The response came as before, "What are my master's orders?"

He saw no one this time either, and he said, "If there is anybody in this hut who

hears what I say, I wish that person would be kind enough to bring me some food."

The next moment a table, bountifully laden with good things to eat, stood before him. He sat down at it on one of the chests, and as he ate and drank thought he had never before enjoyed himself so much in his life.

When he finished he took out the paper and read the words once more—"Nimble Lars."

"What are my master's orders?" the voice asked.

"Well," he responded, "you have given me food and drink, and now you must get me a bed. I am sleepy."

There it stood—a bed so fine and dainty that even the king himself might have coveted it. The duke was greatly pleased, but when he got into it, he began to think that the room was altogether too wretched for such a grand bed.

104 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

Again he took out the paper, and said, "Nimble Lars."

"What are my master's orders?" the voice asked.

He answered: "Since you are able to get me such food and such a bed here in the midst of the wild forest, I suppose you can manage to get me a better room. You see I am used to sleeping in a palace, with golden mirrors, and draperies, and comforts of all kinds.

No sooner had he spoken than he found himself lying in the grandest chamber anybody had ever seen. Now he felt quite satisfied, and he closed his eyes and slept.

When he got up in the morning he was surprised to find that he had not only the chamber in which he had spent the night, but an entire palace. He wandered from one room to another, discovering everywhere all sorts of finery and luxuries.

Then he happened to glance out of a window. Good gracious! there was something else than pine forest and juniper bushes to look at. He saw as splendid a garden as any one could wish for with graceful trees and all kinds of roses. But neither indoors nor out did he see a single human being or even a cat.

He felt lonely, and took out the piece of paper. "Nimble Lars," he said; and the voice ask, "What are my master's orders?"

"You have given me food, a bed, and a palace," he remarked. "The place suits me, and I intend to stay here. But I must have servants to wait on me."

Instantly there they were—stewards and chambermaids and all the rest standing before him, the men and boys bowing, and the women and girls curtsyng. Now the duke was confident that he had everything he wanted.

XVII

THE DUKE'S PALACE

It happened that the palace of the king who owned the forest was not far away on the woodland borders. That morning, as his Majesty was walking up and down in his room, he looked out and glimpsed through the trees the roofs of the grand new palace surmounted with golden weathercocks that were swinging to and fro in the breeze.

“This is very strange,” he thought, and he called his courtiers who came hurrying in, bowing and scraping.

“Do you see a palace over there?” the king asked.

They began to stare with wide open eyes. Yes, of course they saw it.

“Who has dared to build a palace on my property?” the king demanded.

They did not know anything about it. Then he summoned his generals and captains. They came, stood to attention, and presented arms.

“Officers,” he said, “go with your soldiers and troopers and pull down that palace over there. Also hang the wretch who built it. Make haste!”

They were soon on their way riding ahead of their soldiers and troopers, who were well provided with weapons and tools. The drummers beat their drums, and the trumpeters blew their trumpets, and the duke heard them long before he could see them.

He took out his scrap of paper and said, “Nimble Lars.”

“What are my master’s orders?” the voice asked.

“I hear soldiers coming,” he said. “You

108 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

must provide me with double their number, and see that they have swords and pistols, and guns and cannon. There's no time to lose; so be quick about it."

He went to a window, and looked out, and there were his soldiers drawn up in orderly array around the palace. When the king's men approached they came to a sudden halt. They dared not advance, and the duke went to their commander and asked what he wanted.

The commander told his errand, and the duke said: "You see you can do nothing. If the king will listen to me, we shall become good friends, and I will help him against his enemies."

This seemed to the commander the proper solution of the difficulty, and the duke invited him and his soldiers into the palace where all were served with plenty of good things to eat and drink.

During the feasting there was much talking, and the duke learned that the king had a daughter who was his only child, and who was wonderfully fair and beautiful. The more the king's men ate and drank, the more they thought she would suit the duke for a wife. As he listened to them he began to think so himself.

"But we warn you," they said, "that she is just as proud as she is beautiful, and it will be no easy matter to win her."

After the soldiers had eaten and drank as much as they could find room for, they shouted, "Hurrah!" so that it echoed among the hills. Then they set off homeward. But they did not walk exactly in parade order; for they were rather unsteady about the knees, and many of them did not carry their guns in the regulation manner.

The duke had asked them to greet the king from him and to say that he would call on

110 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

him the following day. When he was alone again, he thought of the princess and wondered if she was as beautiful as they made her out to be. He would like to make sure of it.

So he called for Nimble Lars and said, "As soon as the king's daughter is asleep this night take me to her room that I may see her; and be very quiet about it so we will not wake her."

His order was obeyed, and he certainly thought the princess looked wonderfully beautiful. Yes, she was as sweet as sugar, I can tell you. The more he looked the more he liked her, and when he was whisked back to his palace he said, "I will ask for her hand tomorrow."

The king's soldiers had returned to his Majesty's palace rather late in the day, and they concluded not to report until the morning. So when the king rose he was unaware

that his expedition had not accomplished its purpose.

“I suppose I shall not be troubled with the sight of that palace any more,” he said. But, zounds! he looked out, and there it stood just as on the day before, and the sun shone on the roof and the golden weather-cocks.

He became furious and called his courtiers. They came quicker than usual, and bowed and scraped.

“Do you see the palace there?” the king screamed.

They stretched their necks, and stared and gaped. Yes, of course they saw it.

“Have I not ordered that it should be pulled down and its builder hung?” he demanded.

Yes, they could not deny that.

Just then the commander of the expedition came in. He reported what had hap-

112 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

pened, and how many soldiers the duke had, and how wonderfully grand the palace was, and how the duke had sent his greetings to the king.

The latter felt quite confused. He had to put his crown on the table and scratch his head. While he sat there pondering, the princess came into the room and joined him. Then they heard an approaching din of drums, trumpets, and other instruments.

Soon a messenger informed the king that the duke had arrived with a large and richly dressed company. So the king put on his crown and his coronation robes, and went out on the steps to receive them. The princess followed him.

The duke bowed most graciously, and the king did likewise, and when they had talked a while about their affairs and their grandeur they became the best of friends. A great banquet was prepared, and the duke was

placed next to the princess at the table. She found him so fine and handsome, and he spoke so well for himself that she could not very well say "No" to anything he said.

Then he went to the king and asked for her hand, and the king could not very well say "No" either; for he could see that the duke was a person with whom it was best to be on friendly terms.

The wedding took place in grand style not long afterward. This was followed by a great feast at the duke's palace, and then life went on for some time so smoothly that it seemed likely to go on that way forever.

XVIII

A SCRAP OF PAPER

ONE evening the duke heard the voice of Nimble Lars asking, "Are you satisfied now?"

"Well, I ought to be," the duke replied. "You have provided me with everything I possess."

"Yes, and what have I got in return?" Lars said.

"Nothing," the duke answered. "But, bless me! what could I have given you whom I have never seen? If there is anything I can do for you, tell me what it is, and I shall do it."

"Well," Lars said, "I would like that little scrap of paper you found in the chest."

"Is that all?" the duke remarked. "I

can easily do without it, for I know the words on it by heart."

"Put it on the chair in front of your bed when you retire," Lars said. "I will get it during the night."

The duke did as he was told. Early in the morning he awoke, feeling so cold that his teeth chattered. He looked around and found that instead of being in a grand bed in a magnificent palace, he lay on the big chest in the tumble-down hut. His clothing was the same shabby suit he wore when he first sought shelter there.

He began to shout, "Nimble Lars!" but got no answer.

It was soon clear to him how matters stood. When Lars got the scrap of paper he was freed from service, and he had taken all his gifts with him.

The princess fared just as the duke had. She was there in the hut with him clad in

116 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

some of the garments she wore in her father's palace.

He explained everything to her, and asked her to leave him. But she would not hear of it. She well remembered what the parson had said when he married them, and she would never, never leave him, she declared.

Meanwhile the king in his palace had also awakened. He looked out of the window and saw no sign whatever of the palace where his daughter and son-in-law lived. He became uneasy, as you may imagine, and called his courtiers. They came in, and began to bow and scrape.

"Do you see the palace over yonder in the forest?" he asked.

They stretched their necks and stared with all their might. No, they did not see it.

"Where has it gone to then?" the king asked.

“Well, really, we do not know,” they replied.

Soon the king set out with all his court through the forest. When he arrived at the spot where the beautiful palace and garden should have been, he could see nothing but pine trees and juniper bushes and a tumble-down hut. He entered the hut, and there stood his son-in-law in travel-worn clothing, and his daughter weeping.

“Mercy! what does all this mean?” the king asked.

But neither the duke nor the princess would answer. At last the king became angry. He was convinced that the duke was not what he pretended to be, and he ordered him to be hanged without any loss of time.

The princess begged her father to spare him, but her tears and prayers did not avail. A gallows was erected, and a rope placed around his neck. But while the gallows was

118 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

being prepared, the princess had got hold of the hangman and his assistant and given them some money to so manage the hanging of the duke that he would not lose his life. In the night they were to cut him down, and he and the princess would secretly get away out of the country.

The hanging was managed as she desired, and the king and his court and all the people left the forest. The duke had plenty of time to reflect now. If he could only get hold of the scrap of paper he had let Lars have, all would be right again.

“Ah, well, ah well!” he sighed; and he dangled his legs, which was really all he could do.

The day passed slowly and tediously for him, and the sun sank low behind the forest. Just then he heard a loud shouting and saw a cartload of worn-out shoes coming. On top of the load was perched a little old man



Nimble Lars and his cartload of old shoes

in gray clothes, and with a red pointed cap on his head.

It did not seem best to the duke to let any one think the hanging had been a failure, and he pretended to be lifeless.

The little old man drove straight to the gallows, and when he arrived under it he stopped and looked up at the duke. "How stupid you were!" he said laughing. "Yes, there you are hanging, and here am I carting away all the shoes I have worn out for your whims. I wonder if you recognize this bit of paper, and can read what is written on it."

He laughed again, and held the paper up before the duke's eyes. But this time it was Lars who was befooled.

The duke made a clutch, snatched the paper away from him, and shouted, "Nimble Lars!"

Lars vanished from sight, but his voice

120 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

asked humbly, "What are my master's orders?"

"You must cut me down from the gallows," the duke said, "put my palace and everything else back in place, and bring the princess here."

All went merrily as in a dance, and before long all things were as they had been before Lars went off with the scrap of paper.

XIX

▲ PUZZLING SITUATION

WHEN the king awoke the next morning he looked out of the window, as was his custom, and there stood the palace again with the weathercocks glittering in the sunshine. He called his courtiers, and they began to bow and scrape. "Do you see that palace over there?" he asked.

They stretched their necks as far as they could, and stared and gaped. Yes, of course they did.

The king sent for the princess, but she was not to be found. He took off his crown and scratched his head. But that did not enlighten him. He could make no sense out of affairs.

So he set off through the forest with all his

122 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

court. The gallows had disappeared, and there was the palace, sure enough. The garden and the roses were exactly as they used to be, and the duke's servants were everywhere busy. His son-in-law and his daughter received him on the steps, dressed in their finest clothes.

"Well, I never saw the like of this," the king thought; and he could scarcely believe his own eyes.

"Welcome, and peace be with you," the duke said.

The king stood staring at him. "Are you my son-in-law?" he asked.

"Well, I suppose I am," the duke answered. "Who else should I be?"

"Did I not order you to be hanged yesterday like any common thief?" the king inquired.

"You must have been bewitched," the duke said with a laugh. "Do you think I am a

man to let myself be hanged? Is there any one here who dares to believe such a thing?" And he looked fiercely at the courtiers.

They bowed and scraped and cringed before him. "We have more sense than that, we should hope," they said.

The king did not know what to think. "Didn't I come here yesterday and find the whole palace gone?" he asked the duke. "And wasn't there an old hut in its place? Didn't I go into the hut, and find you and my daughter very poorly clothed?"

"I wonder the king can talk so," the duke said. "Surely, the forest trolls must have bewitched your eyes." Then he turned to the courtiers and asked, "What do you think?"

They bowed and scraped till their backs were bent double, and agreed with everything he said.

The king rubbed his eyes, and looked

124 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

round about him, and said to the duke: "I suppose it is as you say then. It is well I have got back my proper sight and come to my senses, for it would have been a sin and a shame if I had let you be hanged."

So he was happy again, and no one thought any more about the matter.

The duke in future managed most of his affairs so that Lars was seldom required to wear out his shoes doing tasks for him. The king soon gave him half the kingdom. After that the duke had plenty to do, and the people said they would have to search a long time to find his equal in wise and just ruling.

One day Lars' voice spoke to the duke saying: "You do not need my help any longer. I move about so little that my shoes are getting covered with moss. Perhaps you would be willing to give me a leave of absence."

“I think I could do without you,” the duke responded. “But I don’t want to risk losing this palace and its furnishings. Such a clever builder as you I shall never get again. Besides there’s the chance of my being hung. No, I can’t give you back your paper.”

“Well,” Lars said, “as long as you have it, I need not fear; but if any one else should get hold of it there would be nothing but running and trudging about again. That’s what I want to avoid. When one has been working as I have for a thousand years he begins to get tired of it.”

They went on talking and at last agreed that the duke should put the paper in a box which he would bury, with a great flat stone on top of it, ten feet underground. Then they parted.

The duke lived happy and contented with the princess, and they had sons and daugh-

126 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

ters. When the king died, he got the whole kingdom, and no doubt he still lives and reigns there if he is not dead.

As for the buried box with the scrap of paper in it, there are many who still go digging for it.

XX

PAYING THE JUDGE

A CAT and a rat found a big piece of cheese in a closet, and carried it away. But they couldn't agree how to divide it. So they called in a fox to judge between them.

The fox was very cunning. He got some scales and put the cheese on them. Then he took a knife and cut off a big piece. "That is for the judge," he said, putting the piece aside.

Again he weighed the cheese and again he cut off a piece, put it with the other he had cut off and said, "That is for the judge also."

By this time he had taken more than half the cheese. He had put what remained back on the scales and was about to weigh it when

128 BEDTIME WONDER TALES

the cat and the rat called out: "Hold on, judge! This thing is wrong. You are going to take all the cheese and leave us none."

The fox was very much vexed. He gathered up the cheese and shouted: "Begone, you rogues! You live by stealing, and yet you tell me how to do justice. You are lucky that I only take the cheese and let you go with your lives. I have a great mind to kill you both."

With that, the cat and the rat left in a hurry; and the fox ate all the cheese.





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00024549379